

Whitchurch glory as Bowen hails “never say die team spirit”..

League title decided in 5 run thriller at Frankton..

By Jamie Dowley

On paper what looked like a simple dash to Hardwick Park to secure the title for **Whitchurch** at already relegated **Frankton**, appeared to be turning into a nightmare for Dan Bowen, as his team endured a catastrophic start with the bat in favourable bowling conditions at Hardwick Park. Losing Maz Hasnain in the first over did little to calm the nerves but it got so much worse as wickets continued to tumble. The three pronged home seam attack of Stuart Lammie, Rich Parry-Jones and the outstanding Will Evans really were a handful, albeit they weren't helped by several dropped catches that really should have meant Whitchurch being dismissed for around 60. At 76-9 it was bad enough for the leaders but a last wicket partnership of 41 between the unheralded pair of Alex Heath (13no) and Shabbir Khan (18) ultimately proved to be a crucial one. Extras (32) also helped with byes and wides aplenty, as numbers 10 and 11 top scored off the bat.

A total of 117 was in the bank and one that Bowen would have been hopeful of defending with the stellar attack at his disposal. Heath struck early as usual, but then the runs came freely as a 56 run partnership between George Dickin and Tom Wilkie seemed to be taking the game Franktons way. Shabbir came into the attack and stemmed the run rate, his 10 overs yielding 2-22, but even so at 86-4 only 32 were required. Bowen rolled the dice turning to Adan Hussain as his 6th bowler and not for the first time he made a big impact as he quickly struck twice. 12 were needed with 4 wickets remaining, and Ryan Kruger going ok, but when Adan removed him lbw for 21, he quickly wrapped it up finishing with 5-15. Scenes of jubilation among the players and support staff, as they win a first title in 7 years.

After the game I grabbed a word with a delighted Dan Bowen. ***“This is a special moment. I've played a lot of good level cricket and the team spirit we have here is better than anything I've experienced before and it's the main reason we are sitting here with the title. Someone always seems to put their hand up and get us over the line in these close games its crazy really. Today it was Danny, but the last wicket between Alex and Shab was incredible given the pressure at 70 odd for 9. But everyone sat in that changing room can be proud tonight”***

For Whitchurch chairman Iain Marsh, a man who always wears his heart on his sleeve ***“I've had the toughest 6 months of my life and I couldn't have got through it without my cricket family and today, to see what this means to everyone at the club is such a such special moment. After 2 games we were thinking of a relegation battle, and to win 18 of the next 20 is fantasy cricket really”***

So its onto the play offs now and what does Bowen think of their chances. ***“It will be tough we know a little about a couple of the teams, Handsworth first up are a bit of an unknown quantity but we will give it our best shot without putting too much expectation onto ourselves. But today is what we judge our season on, the play offs are a bonus”***



Victorious captain Dan Bowen receives the trophy off SCCL Committee member Liam O'Neill

I'm not sure who first said it but "it's the hope that kills you" is very apt phrase. As events unfolded at Frankton, no doubt the play cricket refresh button was taking a pounding at **Quatt** who did all that could be asked of them by beating **Madeley**. Batting first they put 157 on the board, Ryan Wheldon top scoring with 38. Salim Ahmed took 4-16 and Mithun 3-17 as the visitors would have fancied chasing it down, sadly it was not to be as they were shot out for 75, Alex Biddle the pick of the Quatt attack with 4-16 while Kuldeep Diwan took 3-16 to finish the season with 65 league wickets at 8 apiece. So its yet another runner up position for Quatt after leading the table for the vast majority of the season. The search for a first title since 2012 goes on and you have to feel for them as points deductions have really hurt on this occasion. One thing you can guarantee though is they will be a strong force again next year, and Howard Sanders et al will be putting plans in place for 2025.

Frankton wasn't the only venue in North Shropshire to host a dramatic afternoon of cricket as **St Georges** travelled to **Wem** knowing they simply had to win to give themselves a chance of survival. Batting first they reached 150 with Mo Khattak making 45, as Tom Astley took 4-41 and Irfan 3-17 on possibly his last appearance for the club. A revamped end of season batting order for Wem dug in for the chase but came up against Faisal Khan who took 3-9 off his 10 overs while Mike Myatt struck thrice also taking 3-35 as the Dragons

famous battling spirit came to the fore and deliver a 28 run win and a 9th place finish that they hope will be enough to keep them up. A delighted Sam Morgan spoke after the game:

“we were thrilled to get the win today, and I am so proud of how we have fought as a team in recent weeks. All the bowlers were superb in defending 150, but shout to Faisal who bowled 54 dot balls and 6 maidens in a row. We have worked hard as a unit to stick together the last few weeks and salvage something out of a difficult season. We hope we have done enough to secure Premier cricket for 2025 as our results have shown we can compete with anyone on our day and to get well over 200 points is not a bad season overall”

Oswestry (provisionally) jumped up a position to finish 10th, a placing that in a normal season would have seen the celebration bunting up at Morda Rd. But as we know with extra relegation from the BDPCL baked in, its over to the Membership and Structure Committee to determine the divisional make ups in 2025, and right now it looks difficult to see a scenario where 3rd bottom stays up. Their opponents on the day **Ludlow** have long since secured their own position for next year but were on the receiving end of a 21 run defeat in North Shropshire. Captain Josh Darley led with 52, while for Ludlow Luke Miles and Oliver King split 6 wickets equally, as Oswestry reached 168ao, a total that was defended in part thanks to Joe Monk (4-30). Sam Edwards top scored with 41 as the Burway men (and ladies) ended the season with a long trek down south pondering defeat.

Allscott gained another place to finish a highly credible 7th as a result of a dramatic 1 wicket win at **Shelton**. West Indian Antonio Morris enjoyed the final game of his extended holiday in the UK scoring 78, assisted by 32 from Ben Matthews, these two the only players in double figures as the hosts were dismissed for 132 inside 33 overs. Jason Summers with 4-19 and Matthew Hutchings with 3-17 the chief protagonists for Allscott. Summers was again to the fore with 34 but it was a 50 partnership between Starling brothers Carl and Callum that really breathed life into the run chase, and despite the pair both falling with victory in sight, the tail of Hutchings and Connor Starling held their nerve and got them over the line. It's been a successful season for both these sides, Shelton skipper Simon Jones will be a happy man with their 4th place finish and on a personal level his 5 wicket haul took him to 50 league wickets, a superb achievement by the Welshman.

Finally **Sentinel** finished off their season on a high and a top half finish, after a solid win over **Shrewsbury 2nds**, a result that will likely bring the London Roaders two year stay in the Premier Division to an end once the final table has been confirmed. Rico Fourie signed off with 69, Connor Cheshire with 54 and 32 for veteran Mal Serplet enabled a total of 216, Dan Manders with 4-52 on his first bowling outing of the season and Thomas Richards with 3-36 performed well for Shrewsbury. Richards also top scored with 39, as the hosts were dismissed for 119, with Oliver Wilson taking a seasons best 4-27, while Jacob Binnarsley shared new ball duties in taking 3-27.

So the Premier Division wraps up, look out for my team by team review of the season plus an unofficial team of the year later in the week. Also with 2 weeks to go in the rest of the league we will delve into the lower divisions for a more in depth look..

I hope you have enjoyed my reports this year, they may return in 2025...